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JERUSALEM AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

by

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September 1998

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JERUSALEM AND THE ARAB ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

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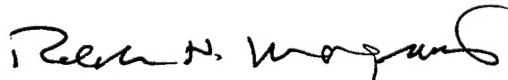
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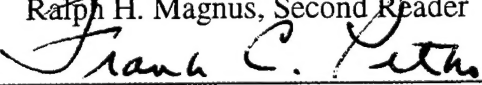
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The disposition of Jerusalem is among the handful of 'final status' issues to be negotiated between Israel and the PLO according to the 1993 Declaration of Principles (the Oslo Accord). This thesis argues that, unlike other final status issues that are more technical and bilateral in nature, the issue and symbolism of Jerusalem are so entangled in *domestic* political processes that negotiated, bilateral resolution has become virtually impossible. That is, Jerusalem has become a defining issue within both domestic Israeli and domestic Palestinian political discourse and processes that resolving it equitably has become problematic even in the best of circumstances. While there is no shortage of creative, viable plans to share Jerusalem, there is a shortage of the domestic political space necessary to negotiate its resolution. As a general rule, the more a disputed issue *between* polities becomes a domestic political issue *within* the polities, the less likely it becomes to resolve it through bilateral negotiations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A Dome, a Tomb and a Wall; a Crescent, a Cross and a Star. The shrines of three faiths—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—all in one city, Jerusalem. In fact, the holiness of Jerusalem can be attributed to these holy shrines: the Church of the Holy Sepulture for Christians, the Wailing Wall for Jews, and the Dome of the Rock and al Aqsa Mosque for Muslims. All three shrines are located within the ancient walled city, surrounded by the believers. We must distinguish between the God-given, holy areas and those added to the city by successive government acts in response to population growth. For example, in 1933, the British High Commissioner expanded the city limits; this did not expand the areas of God-given holiness. The essential dispute about Jerusalem concerns not the modern secular city—the restaurants, the nightclubs and international hotels—but rather the ancient walled city.¹

The Jerusalem issue is the most significant and complex part of the permanent status negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis because of its profound resonance with both Palestinian Arabs and Israelis. Its absolute centrality derives from neither security nor economic considerations, but primarily from emotional and religious sensitivities. Political parties and other organizations have used the sacredness of the religious sites in Jerusalem to achieve certain objectives.

This thesis examines the paradoxical centrality of the issue of Jerusalem in the Arab-Israeli peace process. It argues for the inherently contradictory relationship between the issue of Jerusalem as domestic political symbol for both sides and as an issue for negotiated compromise. In short, the degree to which Jerusalem is used for internal

political purposes (in Israel, for example) directly undermines the prospect for an externally-negotiated settlement. The thesis will consist of four chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter II considers the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This chapter will examine the centrality of Jerusalem in the Arab-Israeli disputes beginning at the turn of the nineteenth century. It will concentrate on the creation of Zionism and its primary goal, as well as the various proposals concerning the fate of Jerusalem, such as the internationalization of Jerusalem in the 1947 Partition Plan. The chapter will also provide a concise discussion of Israel's de facto annexation of Eastern Jerusalem after the Six-Day War. The point of this chapter is to show that, if seen purely as an issue of bilateral negotiations between the disputed parties, the issue of Jerusalem is solvable. There is no shortage of creative, viable solutions for sharing Jerusalem.

Chapter III examines Jerusalem as an Israeli domestic issue. How, for example, do the major Israeli political parties use the symbol of Jerusalem to push their own domestic agendas? Why, for instance, did the Likud party use Jerusalem as soft spot against the Labor party during the 1996 election? This chapter shows the absolute centrality of Jerusalem as a political symbol within domestic Israeli politics. Jerusalem has become a litmus test of legitimacy for Israeli actors. Israel makes concessions on other issues with Arab parties tend to do so, while at the same time compensating for this (for domestic purposes) by being more nationalistic over Jerusalem.

Chapter IV examines Jerusalem as a Palestinian domestic issue. How have Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority used Jerusalem as a symbol to advance their political agenda? Arafat and others in the PA routinely use a discourse of jihad (holy war)

concerning Jerusalem and speak of it as the capital of the future state. Opponents to peace, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, vowed to fight both the PLO and the Israelis to liberate Jerusalem for the Islamic world. This chapter shows that the Palestinian Authority's use of the symbol of Jerusalem for domestic political purposes (primarily as a response to Hamas) undermines the very prospect of a negotiated settlement with significant symbolic concessions.

Chapter V, the conclusion, discusses how *domestic* political uses of the symbol of Jerusalem undermines the ability of the conflicting parties to reach a negotiated *bilateral* settlement over it. Jerusalem is the only final issue that carries with it such momentous domestic political symbolism (by comparison to, for example, Jewish settlements in the West Bank).

II. THE ROOTS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

At the turn of the nineteenth century, most of the Arab Middle East was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which was nearing collapse. Compared to western European nations, the Ottoman Empire was backward and undeveloped and lacked modern industry. The European states of Great Britain, Germany, France, and Russia looked greedily at the fading empire. All these nations had important trade interests in the Middle East and Far East, and they hoped to expand their military and economic power by taking control of the Ottoman Empire. Great Britain was especially interested in the Middle East because it was so near Britain's most prized possession, India.² Both France and Great Britain had already gained control of regions around the Suez Canal, an important shipping passage that halved the time required to transport goods from the Far East to Europe. These two nations would play an important role in the conflict that was brewing between Arabs and Jews.

A. ZIONISM AND THE BRITISH MANDATE IN PALESTINE

For centuries, the Jewish people had a religious and cultural identity, but no formalized nation. Throughout the centuries, they had been subject to persecution and anti-Semitism, especially in Europe. In response to these circumstances, an Austrian newspaperman, Theodor Herzl, founded a movement called Zionism in the late 1800s. Herzl was convinced that the only way for Jews to be safe from anti-Semitism was to live in a Jewish state. He and his followers believed the Jewish state should be located in the ancient promised land of Palestine. Zionist leaders adopted his position in the platform of

their 1897 congress: the aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public laws.³

A small minority of Jews had been living in Palestine for centuries, but now European Jews began immigrating to the area. They bought land and established farms and settlements. In 1918, the population in Palestine numbered about 700,000 Arabs and 56,000 Jews. Arabs were concerned that the influx of Jews would derail their own plans for an independent Arab state. The Arabs had been under Ottoman rule for centuries and, like the Jews, wanted a state under their own political control. Both the Arabs and the Jews hoped to make Palestine the site of their independent states. Palestine would soon become a battleground of these conflicting interests as the world powers moved toward war.⁴

Until the First World War, there was no Palestinian problem. This stems from the fact that when the British took Palestine from the Turks, the Arabs were an overwhelming majority in the country. The conflict began when Jewish immigrants, under the terms of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, arrived in sufficient numbers to lead the Arabs of Palestine to believe they were threatened—as well as betrayed. That conflict was never resolved. And an inseparable part of the problem was the contradictory promises regarding the future of Palestine which the British had made during their wartime negotiations with the Arabs, with the Jews, and with the French and their other Allies—at the very time that President Wilson's Fourteen Points gave expression to a rising spirit of national self determination. The problem is still with us today, after four wars (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973,) and a peace agreement with Egypt.⁵

In 1915, the British, anxious to gain Arab support in the war against Turkey, exchanged letters (known as the McMahon Correspondence) with the Sharif Hussein of Mecca regarding the terms and conditions under which the Arab people, for whom he acted as spokesman, would enter the war. The Arabs asked that, in return for their entry into the war, the British recognize their independence. While the wording of the British commitment (dated October 24, 1915) was vague as to the precise area that would become independent after the war, the Arabs understood—and have continued to claim—that Palestine was included this area. In keeping with their agreement with the British, the Arabs launched their revolt in June 1916 and contributed significantly to the war effort against Turks. By early 1918, more Turkish troops were engaged against Arab forces than against British forces. At the end of the war, the entire area in which Arab independence would be recognized had been liberated, and the Arabs felt they had fulfilled their part of the bargain.⁶

The British, however, also made a wartime commitment to the Jews. During the early part of the war, the Zionists in Great Britain—most notably Chaim Weizmann, who was doing war work for the British Admiralty—were in frequent touch with leaders of the British government to persuade them to make some expression of official sympathy with Jewish aspirations regarding Palestine. On November 2, 1917, the foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, wrote the head of the British Zionist Federation a letter which has come to be known as Balfour Declaration. Balfour wrote, in language deliberately vague, that his Majesty's government favored the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," on the condition that nothing to be done to "prejudice the civil and

religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed in any other country."⁷

There was an almost complete lack of knowledge (on the part of the British) as to the actual situation in Palestine. Practically no one seems to have realized that the "existing non-Jewish communities" mentioned by Balfour represented nearly 90 percent of Palestine's inhabitants at the beginning of the war.

In December 1917, the British forces under Allenby entered Jerusalem, and by the following summer, all of Palestine had been freed of Turkish rule and placed under British administration. At the outset, Arab leaders did not display much concern over the implications of the Balfour Declaration. In fact, the Amir Faysal, who had been prominent in the Arab revolt and in the movement for independence, held two meetings with Dr. Weizmann, and signed an agreement with him providing for the implementation of the Balfour Declaration and for the encouragement of large-scale Jewish immigration into Palestine. Faysal, however, made his concurrence conditional upon the fulfillment by the British of their pledges regarding independence, and the agreement with Weizmann fell through.⁸

The situation with respect to immigration changed markedly in the 1930s, with the threat and the reality of Hitler's assuming power in Germany. By 1939, the Jews, who in the first census of 1922 had totaled 84,000 or 13 percent of a population of 649,000, totaled 450,000 or 30 percent of the now one and a half million people in the region. The Arabs of Palestine reacted to this increased immigration of the Jews by launching a campaign of outright terrorism. By 1936, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the British government appointed a Royal Commission (the Peel

Commission) to examine the problem. The Peel Commission's solution was the termination of the Mandate and the partition of the country into Arab and Jewish states, with a Jerusalem enclave remaining under British administration.⁹

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the country became relatively quiet as the emphasis shifted to Hitler's Europe, where the systematic annihilation of millions of Jews shocked the conscience of mankind and convinced many, both Jews and non-Jews, that the Jews had to have a state of their own. In fact, in 1942, in the midst of the war, at a Zionist convention at the Biltmore Hotel in the New York City, the Zionists, for the first time in their history, came out officially for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁰

B. THE UNITED NATIONS' PARTITION PLAN

In April 1947, a special session of the United Nations General Assembly met and set up a commission, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, or UNSCOP. This body submitted majority and minority reports for consideration by the General Assembly in the autumn. The majority report, which was based on the assumption that Jewish and Arab claims were irreconcilable, proposed the partition of the country. There would be a Jewish state and an Arab state in economic union with each other, and an area surrounding Jerusalem would be placed under United Nations administration.

When the majority report was made public, the Zionists gave it their reluctant approval, while the Arabs came out strongly against it. In the General Assembly, the United States backed the proposal and worked hard behind the scenes to bring about its adoption. The Soviet Union also supported partition. On November 29, 1947, the

majority plan, with some modifications, was approved by the Assembly by a vote of 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions. The British were with those who abstained.¹¹

The security situation in Palestine grew worse, with increased terrorist activity and the outbreak of actual fighting between Arabs and Jews. The United Nations Palestine Commission, which had been established by the November 29, 1947 resolution of the General Assembly, reported to the Security General that an international police force would be necessary to implement partition. Such, however, was not established.

C. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Events were moving too fast: the British continued to make plans for their withdrawal from Palestine (scheduled for mid-May, 1948); the Jews continued to make plans for setting up their state; and the Arabs continued to make plans for opposing this by force. As the ship bearing the last British High Commissioner sailed from Haifa port late on May 14, 1948, leaders of the Jewish community, who had laid careful plans for this day, met in Tel Aviv and proclaimed the state of Israel. President Truman recognized the new state. Simultaneously, Arab forces from Egypt, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, advanced and engaged in fighting with Jewish forces. It was then that the majority of the Arab refugees left, creating the Arab refugee problem. After a bitter fight, the Israelis also secured a corridor to Jerusalem. The city itself was occupied partly by them and partly by the Arabs.¹²

The Security Council ordered a cease-fire, and the United Nations' acting mediator, Dr. Ralph Bunche, (the replacement for Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden, who was assassinated in September 1948) met with Israeli and Arab representatives on the Island of Rhodes. There, Bunche skillfully conducted long and difficult negotiations

which finally culminated in the Armistice Agreements of 1949 between Israel and its four Arab neighbors—Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan (with Iraq represented by Jordan).

The armistice settlement did not provide a solution for Jerusalem, which continued to be divided between Israel and Jordan with the cease-fire line running through the city. In 1948 and 1949, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution reaffirming support for the concept of an international city under the UN, but the next year, 1950, the Assembly failed to agree on any plan for the internationalization, and there the matter was allowed to rest for seventeen years.¹³

III. ISRAEL'S DOMESTIC USE OF JERUSALEM

For the Jews, Jerusalem has been the pre-eminent focus of their spiritual, cultural, and national life for a long time. The foremost Jewish Holy Place in Jerusalem is the Wailing (or Western) wall, the sole remnant of the Temple Mount enclosure dating back to the First and Second Temples.

This chapter will first discuss Israel's de facto annexation of Eastern Jerusalem; it will then examine how the major political actors of Israel's political parties (Likud and Labor) use the issue of Jerusalem to further their domestic agendas and also to defame each other's political opponents. Finally, this chapter will analyze the 1996 election and how the political actors of both parties and their allies used Jerusalem to win political power.

A. DE FACTO ANNEXATION OF EASTERN JERUSALEM

Rabbi Kohen, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, said at a Municipal Council meeting on August 13, 1967:

I dare say frankly that we have to do everything within our power to make Greater Jerusalem the largest Jewish city in the world, a real Jewish city, both in terms of population numbers and in giving a permanent Jewish character to the whole city.¹⁴

When the Six-Day War broke out in June 1967, the Israeli Defense Forces captured and then annexed East Jerusalem. Their objective was to consolidate Israeli sovereignty, which was based on its control of land and its application of law. The Israeli government passed legislation incorporating East Jerusalem and adjacent parts of the West Bank into Israel. Israel had established its own legal basis for its sovereignty over

West Jerusalem through the first law of the Israeli Provisional Government, the Law and Administrative Ordinance of 1948, which applied Israeli jurisdiction over all areas held by Israeli military forces. Through an amendment of the same law, Israel, in 1967, proceeded to incorporate East Jerusalem and adjacent parts of the West Bank. These measures were adopted in order to integrate Jerusalem into the administrative and municipal sphere of a Jewish city. In addition, in 1980, the Basic Law, that Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, reaffirmed the Israeli position and also excluded any reference to the annexation and sovereignty of the city on the part of Israelis.¹⁵

However, the position of the international community was that East Jerusalem was occupied territory and that Israel must abide by the international laws governing occupied powers. That position was already in conflict with the government's claim that East Jerusalem had been liberated and "unified," and not occupied.

The "Basic Law of Jerusalem" reads as follows:

1. Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel.
2. Jerusalem is the seat of the President of the State, the Knesset, the Government and the Supreme Court.
3. The Holy Places shall be protected from desecration and other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings towards those places.
4. (a) The Government shall provide for the development and prosperity of Jerusalem and the well being of its inhabitants by allocation special funds, including a special annual grant to the Municipality of Jerusalem (Capital City Grant) with the approval of the Finance Committee of the Knesset.

(b) Jerusalem shall be given special priority in the activities of the authorities of the State so as to further its development in economic and other matters.

(c) The government shall set up special bodies for the implementation of this section.

Signed by Menahem Begin, Prime Minister, and Yitzchak Navon, President of the State.¹⁶

The main purpose of this law was political rather than juridical. It did not legislate any changes, but underlined the political reality of existing Israeli legislation. It also complicated an already tangled problem and tended to obscure available legal, political, and administrative options for the city's future that might have garnered significant support among both Israelis and Palestinians.

What encouraged their decision, according to Israel's argument, was the division of Jerusalem after 1948. The displacement of Jews from the Jewish Quarter of the Old City; the isolation of Mt. Scopus; the lack of Jewish access to the Western Wall and other holy sites in Jordanian-held East Jerusalem; all of these factors impressed upon many Israeli political, military and religious leaders, as well as the Jewish public, the importance of measures which would ensure Jewish control over the entire city. Besides that, Israel uses several other factors to justify its insistence today on maintaining control over the entire city and its immediate hinterland. According to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem is at the very heart of the history of Judaism and the struggle for a Jewish homeland; many Israelis are convinced that the city is theirs by divine right. Furthermore, Israelis feel strongly that Jordan's participation and defeat in the 1967 War justifies Israel's retention of the city.

Despite Israel's pretext of the annexation, international law (Hague Regulations) does not permit a change in the permanent status of belligerently occupied territory; it permits and requires the occupier to assume responsibility for the basic needs of the inhabitants.¹⁷

Finally, strategic factors play a crucial role: permanent Israeli control over the city and its hinterland would divide the West Bank in two, thereby weakening the embryonic Palestinian autonomy (or state) by fragmenting it into smaller components—the Gaza Strip, the northern West Bank, and the southern West Bank. Israel's control also has the prospect of creating a direct link from Israel to the Jordanian border, bypassing the Palestinian State, and thereby avoiding any economic leverage a Palestinian government may have over Israel.¹⁸

B. JERUSALEM: THE CENTER OF ISRAELI POLICY

Jerusalem plays an important role in Israeli domestic issues. It provides the mortar for national unity in an otherwise politically divided country. Israel's insistence on Jewish control of Jerusalem unites the Orthodox Jews with their more secular counterparts, the Ashkenazi elite and growing numbers of Sephardi and oriental immigrants. As the blurred contours of the peace settlement become more distinct, the perception of external threat from other Arab states has weakened, but has exacerbated the deep divisions within Israeli society, especially the political parties.¹⁹

C. IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LABOR AND LIKUD

The two major rivals with divergent ideologies and beliefs are the Likud and Labor parties. The majority of the Israeli people fall behind these two political parties, although several other political groups exist. The Likud Party and its allies advocate

keeping the occupied territories for many reasons, including security. Citing military and intelligence assessments, some public and others classified, many Israelis claim that withdrawal to the 1967 boundaries would be detrimental to the defense of the country-- tantamount to "national suicide." They argue that the West Bank provides crucial "strategic depth" allowing the IDF more time to repel an invasion. Also, according to the Likud, the 1967 borders create an Israel which is so thin at the middle that it could be easily cut in half by an attacking Arab force. In fact, after his defeat in the Israeli election of June 1992, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, from the Likud party, admitted that his policy towards Arab-Israeli peace talks was to stall, while creating more "facts on the ground" intended to solidify Israel's hold on the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967.

The Israeli Labor party, on the other hand, has a different view on the Occupied Territories. While some Labor hawks advocated keeping the land for security reasons, most saw the land in 1967, and still do today, as a bargaining chip. UN Resolution 242 was the formula which Labor politicians had in mind as soon as the war ended. Despite the political differences of the two parties, there is one issue which united them: the "status of Jerusalem." Both parties agreed to keep Jerusalem as a united city under Israeli sovereignty.

D. THE LABOR PARTY IN POWER (1992-96)

The election of a new government in Israel, led by the Labor Party of Yitzhak Rabin, was widely perceived as an event bound to create a new and positive environment for the Arab-Israeli talks. This optimistic prognosis for the effects of Likud's defeat,

however, quickly became questionable as the new Israeli government continued the hard-line policies of Yitzhak Shamir in its negotiations, as well as in its practice on the ground. It was agreed that, although the defeat of the Likud in Israel created a new potential for progress, the impact of Labor's victory had been exaggerated. Arab leaders considered Rabin a vast improvement over Shamir and were hopeful that progress towards peace could be made. Undoubtedly, this was due to his acceptance of the basic land-for-peace formula, whereas Shamir had rejected the formula. However, there was some pessimism in the occupied territories.²⁰ The new government did not intend to curb new settlements in their expanded version of East Jerusalem. Rabin was dedicated to the concept of a "greater Jerusalem" and explicitly ruled out withdrawal to the 1967 border and the creation of a Palestinian state as the outcome of a final status agreement.²¹ It became obvious that the Labor party was as zealous as Likud in safeguarding Jerusalem, but with more circumspection.

Despite little progress in the peace talks, the Likud party and other annexationist politicians were against the comparatively political overtures of the Labor administration towards the peace process. They criticized the new government and its supporters for agreeing to permit Palestinians in East Jerusalem to vote in the proposed elections, and for accepting wording in future negotiations that could imply the possibility of compromise on the status of the city. Yitzhak Shamir (Likud) attacked this political move of the Labor government and condemned Prime Minister Rabin and his supporters for being ready to relinquish the land of Israel. In February 1990, Shamir argued that once the government allowed East Jerusalem to vote in West Bank elections, it would not remain in the territory of Israel.

However, the permanence of Israel's sovereignty over the expanded East Jerusalem had not yet achieved "ideological status," despite the strength of the consensus. Ambitious politicians occasionally suggest the possibility of compromise regarding Jerusalem when it suits their political aims. Various government factions have used the issues of future boundaries and the exact geographical definition of Jerusalem in their endless political discussion over city elections, municipal boundaries, residential status of Arabs and Jews, etc. Using Jerusalem as a partisan political weapon was not only a sign of hegemonic failure, but it also encouraged compromise regarding Israel's assumption of complete sovereignty over Jerusalem.

A letter addressed to the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Johan Jorgen Holst, from the Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, was leaked to the public on October 11, 1994. The purpose of Peres's letter was to confirm and convey to his Norwegian counterpart that the Palestinian Institution of East Jerusalem and the well-being of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem are of great importance and would be preserved. Peres added:

All Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem, including all economic, social, educational and cultural institutions as well as the Christian and Muslim Holy Places are performing an essential task for the Palestinian population. The Government of Israel will not hamper their activity; on the contrary the fulfillment of this important mission is to be encouraged.²²

Many Israelis became angry; the Likud party and the annexationists used this political incident to their advantage and labeled the Labor government as traitors. As a result, to offset possible public mistrust of the government, the Knesset passed a resolution, introduced by a hawkish Labor parliamentarian and supported by all parties on the right of Labor, reaffirming that "united Jerusalem is under Israeli sovereignty and there will be no negotiations on its unity and status."²³ The purpose of the resolution was

identical to that of the Jerusalem Law, to force Israeli politicians to go on record against any compromise regarding its present status.

To the Likud and its allies on the right, their policy was making a fetish out of Jerusalem: the fixation of Jewish authority over Palestinians. But it was certain that no Arab partner would sign a comprehensive peace agreement permitting Jewish sovereignty over an expanded East Jerusalem. It is this political dynamite that has continued to make the city of Jerusalem such a volatile center of political negotiations. For example, in May 1982, the Begin government issued an ultimatum that further negotiations with Egypt and the US over autonomy for Palestinians would be unconceivable unless the talks were held in the three capitals of the contending countries, Cairo, Washington, and Jerusalem. The demand was refused by the Egyptians in their protest against Israel's treatment of expanded East Jerusalem as a part of its capital city.²⁴

According to A. Alon, in a Maa'iv commentary published in August 1992, the Rabin government's peace efforts were doomed by challenging the national consensus on Jerusalem. By opposing Judaization efforts in Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, he argued, the Rabin government made public its "unthinkable position regarding Jerusalem;" i.e., that after withdrawal from Nablus, Gaza, and Hebron, a similar compromise on East Jerusalem would be accepted. Of course, by accusing the Rabin government and its allies of harboring these thoughts, the author undermined the very claim he sought to advance; i.e., that among Israelis, the idea of compromise on Jerusalem is "unthinkable."²⁵

Prime Minister Rabin used his own commitment to the issue of Jerusalem to defend his nationalist credentials against right-wing vilification. He first acknowledged

the consensus shared by an overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews that a "united city" should serve as Israel's capital. Moreover, Rabin clarified his position on the issue of Jerusalem in a statement to the Knesset at the opening of its summer session on May 15, 1995. The Prime Minister declared before the Knesset that his government, like all its predecessors, believed that there was no disagreement in the house concerning Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel. He continued his statement, reiterating that united Jerusalem had been and would forever be the capital of the Jewish people, under Israeli sovereignty. He also confirmed before the Knesset that his administration would not open negotiations concerning the status of Jerusalem. In the same speech, the Prime Minister announced clearly that he would spare no effort in bringing about peace.²⁶

Through these contradictory statements, the Labor government was caught in a political vise, squeezed between its obsessive devotion to an expanded Jerusalem and its belief that peace was both possible and necessary.

The Likud leaders engineered another tactical move to vilify the Labor government before the Jewish people. The new Likud mayor, Ehud Olmert, organized the "Jerusalem 3000 Extravaganza" of 1995-96. His purpose was to undermine the ongoing Israel-Palestinian negotiations. Unable to oppose the celebration, or even advocate more tactful ways to conduct it, Prime Minister Rabin found himself in a political dilemma. Nevertheless, he managed to explain his commitment to building a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by participating in the inauguration of Jerusalem 3000 festivities in Washington DC. on October 25, 1995.²⁷ In his address, Rabin reaffirmed his loyalty to the city and expounded clearly what the city meant to the Jewish and Israeli people.

Again, the Prime Minister clearly said "There is only one Jerusalem for us, Jerusalem is not subject to compromise, nor can there be peace without it."²⁸

The Likud party and annexationists have clung to the set ideology that the city is bound by history and religion to Judaism and, as a consequence, the Jewish Holy City should be administered by a Jewish Government. The Labor party, on the other hand, had it not feared losing the support of those Israeli nationalists within the party, would have more realistically been inclined to support the concept of exchanging part of the city for a lasting peace.

E. JERUSALEM IN THE 1996 ISRAELI ELECTION

By observing Israel's 1996 electoral campaign, one could get a clear picture of the divergence of public opinion towards the final status of Jerusalem. During the election campaign of 1996, the Likud and its allies used Jerusalem to vilify the Labor Party. They publicized that Peres "will divide Jerusalem."

As usual, both Labor and the Likud aimed their election broadcasts at the "floating voters." The two parties have assumed that these voters, while generally supporting the peace process, were not convinced that Labor, led by Peres, could be trusted to achieve the best possible agreements for Israel without giving up too much or taking too many security risks.

In its effort to convince floating voters that Labor, in general, and Peres, in particular, were untrustworthy, the Likud focused on Jerusalem, harping on one specific message: "Peres will divide Jerusalem." To prove its allegation, the Likud party quoted Yasser Arafat's demagogic addresses to mass rallies in which he had listed all the cities

Israel had agreed to hand over to Palestinian control. The last city on the list was Jerusalem.²⁹

Asfour (Labor) stated:

The whole issue of Jerusalem has now become a major theme of the Israeli election, of the fight between the Labor and Likud parties. This is not good. It only sparks incorrect rumors and charges. (Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert) is trying to use Jerusalem to win the election for the Likud, by making all kinds of accusations about the government's plans in Jerusalem.³⁰

Prime Minister Shimon Peres said on May 27, 1996, in a speech to 50 mayors from around the world, "All the reports of plans to divide Jerusalem were false. There was no intention to divide the city." Peres later said at a visit to Tel Nof Air Base:

I want to stress that Jerusalem is not just united, but it also unites us all. We all are united in a clear decision to keep Jerusalem as a united city, as the capital of Israel and not the capital of two states. I do not see that there will be any change in those positions of ours.³¹

Teddy Kollek, (Labor) mayor of Jerusalem until 1993, denied the Likud's party allegation that Peres would divide Jerusalem and argued that Jerusalem was not nearly as central an issue as many politicians were trying to make it; he said:

[T]he country has much more burning topics to deal with than the final settlement on Jerusalem. Indeed our continued sovereignty over the city is one of the few topics about which there is a national consensus. Right now other issues are more important to Israel as a whole, and to Jerusalem itself. For instance, the growing abyss between secular and Orthodox Jews is much more dangerous than Arafat's ambitions regarding the city. It is unlikely that either a Labor or a Likud government would give half of Jerusalem to the Palestinians; but the city's loss of industry and of its productive, secular citizens, especially the young ones, is becoming a very real danger.³²

Teddy Kollek blamed his adversary for bringing up Jerusalem's political future again and again for no reason. At the same time, social and economic issues of the utmost importance remain utterly neglected.

The Labor Party's secretary general, Nissim Zvilli, proposed that the Jerusalem issue be removed from the national election agenda; but the Likud's plan to kick off its campaign with Jerusalem was given top priority. "The entire nation is united on the Jerusalem issue, and there is no sense in raising it as a bone of contention when in fact it is not," Zvilli said. "Moreover, doing so may give the (Arabs) the impression that we really are divided on Jerusalem and there is something to talk about." But Zvilli's proposal was categorically rejected by the Likud and its allies, who argued that Labor was indeed afraid of this issue because there was something happening behind the scenes despite all of Labor's denials, the party's spokeswoman said.³³

The Likud began running ads in the press and on billboards claiming that Labor would redivide Jerusalem. The Likud's campaign suggested that secret Oslo-style talks were already in progress in Europe about the future arrangements in Jerusalem. Since this followed Prime Minister Shimon Peres's denial, the Likud line in effect challenged Peres's credibility. The Likud saw the Jerusalem issue as Labor's soft spot, and the one with which the Likud stood the best chance of making some electoral impact. Tsomet leader Rafael Eitan said that he fully supported the idea of making Jerusalem the central theme of the joint Likud-Tsomet campaign. He added:

Secret negotiations on the division of Jerusalem were already carried out in Europe, and Zvilli's demand to keep the Jerusalem issue out of the electoral campaigns showed lack of honesty and has demonstrated deceit, just as the Labor Party decided that the consensus on the Golan Heights issue in the last elections meant the subject could have been taken off the agenda, only to later agree to give the Golan Heights to Syria with nothing in return.³⁴

Generally, Laborites' judgements tend to be presented in pragmatic rather than ideological terms. The Labor leadership has always displayed sensitivity to outside

constraints. Despite its close relationship with the United States since the 1967 War, Israel has faced international difficulties and even isolation. Labor's rather pragmatic outlook took into consideration growing international acceptance of the PLO and worldwide displeasure at the Israeli military presence in the occupied territories. Most significantly, Laborites heeded U.S policy. Since 1973, the United States has made unprecedented efforts to mediate between Israel and its neighbors.

Consequently, Labor placed the demographic problem on the Israeli political agenda. This was part of Labor's campaign to point out the problem connected with annexation, which some of its political rivals on the right were advocating. Essentially, the demographic problem meant that the Jews would not be able to maintain a majority in western Palestine, including east Jerusalem. Therefore, Labor argued cogently, annexation could only result in the establishment of a bi-national state.

Labor, although stressing in their analysis and their political prescriptions the perceived process of moderation among the Arabs, did not rule out the possibility of future wars. Ironically, the Laborites are much more worried than the Likud about imminent war.

Teddy Kollek could not resist all these allegations, which he suspected might damage the party's credibility if proper actions were not taken. To show to the public what the Labor party had done for country, he referred to the peace made by Likud with Egypt and stressed that it was the Likud that gave up every inch of Sinai and uprooted all the settlements there. It was a Labor-led government that united Jerusalem.

Kollek admitted that when a political party, be it the Likud or Labor, is in power and wants to achieve meaningful results, especially a dramatic result such as peace, it will

make compromises. But it is doubtful that any significant political figure, certainly not within the two major parties, has ever contemplated giving up eastern Jerusalem.

Kollek continued his comments: "We will be able to keep Jerusalem only if we give equal conditions to all sectors of its population including the Palestinians." Kollek undermined Likud's allegation, stressing that tough-sounding slogans reveal a lack of real strength, foresight, wisdom, statesmanship and responsibility. He criticized the Jerusalem Law of 1980, saying that Geula Cohen (Likud) submitted a bill declaring Jerusalem the eternal capital of Israel. Kollek argued that this law was senseless; no other country makes such statements about its capital. Moreover, he stated, the law enabled Israel's adversaries to demand in the UN that all embassies leave Jerusalem. The result was that 15 embassies moved and only those of Panama and El Salvador remained. Nothing whatsoever was gained. Kollek stated:

We all want peace with Jerusalem. But we have to work for it, not advertise. I have no doubt that Labor and its partners can unite the city, and the Likud bloc cannot. Those who want the Likud election slogan to be a reality should therefore vote for the other side, (Labor). The Likud does not promise all Jerusalem citizens equal rights.³⁵

F. CONCLUSION

Jerusalem acts as a symbol of national unity in an otherwise politically divided country. It boosts legitimacy to political powers when legitimization weakens without popular mandate. Both Labor and Likud leaders reiterated on Jerusalem Day that united Jerusalem will remain under Israeli sovereignty eternally. The Labor party accepted the land-for-peace formula, whereas the Likud party rejected it. The Likud party used the "Jerusalem" example (i.e., Peres wants to redive Jerusalem) to vilify the Labor party during the 1996 electoral campaign. The Labor party denied that allegation. But one thing

is fact: Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem is one of the few topics about which there is a national consensus. This shows that the focus on Jerusalem as a political symbol within domestic Israeli politics outweighs the rest of Israel. It would be political suicide for any political actor or statesman to compromise on the issue of Jerusalem in any negotiation for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JERUSALEM IN PALESTINIAN ARAB POLITICS

Jerusalem is the historic capital of Arab Palestine. The largest Arab city in the country, it is universally regarded by Palestinians everywhere as the focus of their national aspirations. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East is not possible, and there can never be Arab recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, without the city being equally recognized by Israel as the capital of Palestine. This was vividly expressed during the events of September 1996, which followed Israel's opening of a tunnel beside al-Aqsa Mosque. During these events, 62 Palestinians and 16 Israeli soldiers were killed, and another 1600 Palestinians were wounded.

This chapter will examine how the PLO became a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It will also discuss the centrality of the Jerusalem issue in Palestinian politics. And, finally, this chapter will analyze how different opponents of the peace process (Hamas, Islamic Jihad) declare jihad against both Arafat and the Israelis to undermine the Peace Process.

A. THE PLO: A LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF PALESTINIAN LAND

King Abdullah of Transjordan was adamant in his opposition to the internationalization of Jerusalem. He saw it as a threat to the legitimacy of his dynasty and to his greater Syria aspirations. In contrast, the other Arab states were in favor of internationalization, and the Arab League passed a number of resolutions to that effect. In 1949, the Palestinian Arab Congress in Jericho voted for a union between the West Bank and Transjordan. East Jerusalem was naturally included in this union. In 1960, King

Hussein of Jordan announced that Jerusalem had been given *amana* status (trusteeship) and would become the second capital of Jordan.³⁶

As the All-Palestine government began to fade in effectiveness, new nationalist groups appeared. These groups were disappointed by the failure of the Arab governments to destroy Israel and win a Palestinian homeland. They were determined to rely on their own efforts to achieve their goal. Yassir Arafat was one of the founders of the largest and most influential of these groups, Fatah, an Arabic word meaning "conquest" or "victory." Unlike other groups, Fatah's sole aim was to establish a Palestinian state. Fatah called on young men to become guerrilla fighters, or *Fidayeen*, literally "men of sacrifice."³⁷

In 1964, Nasser called a meeting for the Arab League and urged the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Nasser wanted to keep the unruly Palestinian guerrilla fighters under his control so that they would not force the Arab world into a war it did not want to fight.

The stated purpose of the PLO was to destroy Israel and to establish a Palestinian homeland. The charter declaring its principles was adopted on June 1, 1964. The charter claimed that "Palestine is an Arab homeland," and article 19 of the charter claimed that Israel had no right to exist. In 1969, Arafat was elected PLO chairman. In 1974, the Rabat summit of the Arab League recognized the PLO as the "sole legitimate" representative of the Palestinians.³⁸

King Hussein sent a letter to Mr. Rabin in which he reiterated Jordan's position on Jerusalem. The letter said that Jerusalem is part of the occupied territories and must be returned to Palestinian sovereignty. The King severed legal and administrative links with

the West Bank in July 1988, after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising. In November, the PLO declared a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In 1991, the United States organized peace talks between Israel and the Arab states. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel insisted that Israel would not negotiate with any representatives from the PLO. However, the Palestinians insisted that the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In 1992, Israel elected a new prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, a General during 1967 Six-Day War, who had captured the new territories for Israel. Rabin, politically more moderate than Shamir, was willing to make some concessions for peace. According to Israeli wishes, the PLO was excluded from the negotiations altogether. It soon became clearer, however, that Palestinian delegates had little power to implement any agreements they might reach. In the meantime, the PLO's influence with the Palestinians in the occupied territories was beginning to decline, and Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which were financed by Iran, were drawing support. The Israelis believed that Iran was developing nuclear weapons and would soon pose a far greater threat to Israel than that posed by the PLO. To Prime Minister Rabin and the Israelis, Arafat was becoming the lesser of two evils.³⁹

B. JERUSALEM AS THE CENTER OF PALESTINIAN ARAB POLITICS

Israel's occupation of the rest of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) in 1967 aggravated the Arab-Israeli conflict in many ways. The denial of Palestinian national rights became total; the colonization of the West Bank and Gaza threatened to make the denial permanent; and the occupation of the eastern half of Jerusalem injected a highly

emotional content into the conflict. The fate and future of Jerusalem became an exclusive issue when Israel unilaterally annexed it and declared it to be "non-negotiable."

In the preparations for the Peace Talks, Arafat played an important role in convincing his people of the concept of peace. He promised that a Palestinian state was within grasp, and that soon the flag would fly above the walls, the minarets and the cathedrals of Jerusalem. When the Oslo peace accord was signed in 1993, nothing was as easy as it seemed to be. It was agreed that the status of the city of Jerusalem would be the last issue to be addressed simply because it was so difficult. Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians over the status of the Holy City were scheduled to begin in 1996. However, the continued terrorist attacks against Israel delayed the implementation of the peace accord. Exactly when the talks about Jerusalem will begin remains uncertain.

When Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Israeli Prime Minister in 1996, he approved the expansion of existing settlements, including the creation of new neighborhoods. This would expand Jerusalem's boundaries westward to increase the Jewish population. Arafat warned that the government's new plan for strengthening Israel's hold over all of Jerusalem could dash the last hopes for peace. Arafat said: "Our Legislative Council is meeting today at this emergency session, to discuss plans which are able to protect Jerusalem from the settlement dangers which threaten it, after the failure of all the international efforts during the last two years to stop the current Israeli government."⁴⁰

Palestinians will use all means to defend the city, Arafat told a special meeting of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah. "The battle for Jerusalem is a battle of

life and death for the Palestinian people," Arafat said. The Netanyahu government, he added, "wants to change the Arabic nature of the sacred city, and deface its cultural sites." In his speech, Arafat said that the Palestinians would never settle for Israeli control over all of the city. "The patience of the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people has run out," Arafat said. "Let Netanyahu and his government know that Jerusalem is a red line, and that there is not one person among us who would make concessions on any grain of soil of Jerusalem."

In his most serious challenge to Netanyahu, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization lashed out at Israel's government for its policies of expanding Jewish settlements in occupied Arab lands and refusing to discuss the sharing of Jerusalem, which Israel and the PLO claim as their capital. "We cannot keep silent. We cannot tolerate this hellish plan that they are carrying out with toughness and stubbornness," declared the president of the self-ruled Palestinian Authority, condemning Netanyahu's government for dragging its feet on peace negotiations. The Palestinian negotiators, aware of Israel's view that Jerusalem is non-negotiable and fearful of Israel's policy of continuing Jewish settlement in the Jerusalem area, felt that the postponement of the Jerusalem question only served Israel's policy of imposing accomplished facts. Israel's refusal to cease settlement activity, however, continued to cast dark shadows over the Holy City and its future.

Whenever Arafat delivers a speech in an organized meeting, he uses the notion of "jihad" and cites verses of the Koran to support his argument for the liberation of the Holy City from Israel. He emphasizes that the commitment still stands, and the oath is valid: that they will continue this long jihad, this difficult jihad—via deaths, via battles. He

also vows that they will continue this bloodbath until the Palestinian boys and girls wave the flag of Palestine over the walls of Jerusalem.

Arafat delivered a speech at a Johannesburg mosque after the Mandela inauguration on May 10, 1994. Arafat's speech revolved primarily around the issue of Jerusalem. He said that the Cairo agreement was merely the first step and that the liberation of Jerusalem was the Muslims' main objective. He called on the Palestinian people to launch a jihad in a bid to liberate Jerusalem.

C. OPPONENTS OF THE PEACE PROCESS

Abdel Aziz Rantisi, co-founder of the militant Islamic opposition group Hamas, declared in an interview by Martin Regg Cohn of the *Toronto Star*, that The Quran, Islam's holy book, commanded him to wipe Israel off the map. There can be no compromise, no co-existence, only jihad, or holy war. According to the Quran, he stated laconically, "Jews will be dismissed from Palestine, and Jerusalem will be liberated by Muslims."⁴¹ Therefore, a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict has mutually exclusive satisfaction. According to the Hamas, Arafat's peace talks with the Israelis are illegal.

Many Palestinians feel that the PLO chairman made a mistake when he approved the Declaration of Principles, that there was no need to recognize the state of Israel and shake Rabin's hand in Washington. Most Palestinians, including those who are not sworn supporters of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and rejectionist fronts, are suspicious that Israel does not intend to repeat the Gaza-Jerico format in the West Bank.

One of the leaders of Islamic Jihad in Damascus told the pan-Arab *al-Hayat* newspaper that the assassination of Arafat and other PLO leaders who endorsed the Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles (DOP), and the so-called Gaza-Jericho first

accord, could not be ruled out. Speaking to the paper's Damascus correspondent, Suleiman Nimr, the unnamed Jihad official said: "Ever since we made our presence known through our jihad operations in the Occupied Territories, we have relied on our secret organization to pursue the Zionist enemy and his followers, along with the followers of those who signed the agreement in the Territories if they stand against our jihad." Asked if this meant Islamic Jihad would try to assassinate Arafat and his group, the Jihad official said: "Every traitor to the Palestinian cause will one day face a Khaled Islambouli [the Egyptian Islamist who was involved in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat] from our people who will hold him to account and make him pay the price." He added, "They say the Palestinians have no option other than this agreement. Although this is a lie and fallacy, we must hold to account those who brought us to this option."

Islamic Jihad and Hamas have joined eight other dissident Palestinian organizations in a Damascus-based alliance dedicated to foiling the Gaza -Jericho accord. Other members of the alliance include the PFLP, the second-largest PLO group, the radical wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). In an interview with Nimr in Damascus, PFLP leader George Habash denounced Arafat as a traitor, declaring that

[h]istory will record that Arafat committed national treason against the Palestinian people and its struggle, and against every martyr that fell for the liberation of Palestine. History will record that Arafat betrayed every martyr's mother who offered her son to the Revolution for the sake of the return [of the Palestinians to their homeland] and the eviction of the occupation. And history has no mercy on traitors.⁴²

Habash vowed that the PFLP and the rest of the ten rejectionist Palestinian groups

would fight with everything they possessed against this agreement, relying on the Palestinian masses. Thus, it was crucial to organize the ten nationalist organizations that rejected the agreement into a single front, including brothers in Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to strip Arafat and his group of all legitimacy, take the PLO back to its nationalist line and National Charter, and bring down this agreement. The rejectionist group believed that Arafat and his group forfeited their legitimacy the moment they signed the Gaza-Jericho accord, which contradicts the principles of the National Charter on which the PLO was built.⁴³

Hamas pledges to continue violent resistance to Israel until Jerusalem is liberated. In a leaflet distributed in Jerusalem, Hamas said that "popular resistance in all its forms mainly jihad (holy war) operations to liberate Jerusalem." Hamas has also disseminated a leaflet in the territories describing Arafat as a traitor and claiming that he fell prey to the Oslo trap and does not have the courage to admit his mistake. The leaflet called on the residents of the territories to remove the occupation in the only possible way, that of jihad.⁴⁴

Hamas also sent a statement to the leading Saudi daily *Asharq al-Awsat* blasting Arafat for condemning the slaying of Israeli settler Haim Mizrahi by members of his own Fateh faction. The PLO chairman's actions are clear evidence that Arafat and his supporters have abandoned the cause of the Palestinian people and the liberation of Jerusalem in favor of Zionist hegemony over the region. According to Hamas, the backsliding of Arafat and his supporters, their condemnation of the operation and their pledge to stand against the actions of the resistance, clearly indicate that the principle mission of the defeated and misguided faction in the frail self-government will be to

suppress the people's mujahideen, throw them in jail, kill them and send them into exile in defense of the Zionist.⁴⁵

The lack of any tangible progress in the bilateral negotiations (Israel and PLO) is increasingly generating opposition to the format and strategy of negotiations among the Palestinians, both within and outside the occupied territories. The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine has issued a call at this historic moment in which the enemy insists on continuing its rabid settlement campaign to Judaize Jerusalem. The call says:

The conspiracy against Jerusalem is a natural outcome of the agreements of capitulation and disgrace in Oslo, Cairo, Taba and Hebron which consecrated and legitimized the entity of the enemy in our homeland, Palestine, in exchange for a powerless authority, which represents a tool of repression and coercion against our people to serve the Zionist occupation, to safeguard its security, and to execute its schemes and ambitions to make Jerusalem its eternal capital.⁴⁶

The PLO's Mufti (religious leader) of Jerusalem, Ikrama Sabri, made statements during a sermon delivered to a crowd of worshippers at the Al Aqsa Mosque, on the Temple Mount on July 11, 1997, and broadcast on the PLO's Voice of Palestine radio station. He said: "There is no one that can deny the Jews act deviously, as the Quran itself shows, and no one knows when they will be stopped. We must rise up against the occupation with all our might to achieve what we want." He added that "Jerusalem is under occupation and the Muslims of the world should liberate it by jihad and put it under Islamic and Arabic authority."⁴⁷

The Mufti called holy war in 1995 to free the Holy city; in his speech, he said, "We consider ourselves holy warriors for this city, and we will not abandon it. . . . Muslims, I am sure that Israel will eventually be destroyed and that the settlements will be your spoils."⁴⁸

D. CONCLUSION

Jerusalem became the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict when the Israelis declared the city its eternal capital. The PLO signed an irrevocable peace process with Israel. The Palestinian extremist groups (Hamas, Islamic Jihad) believe the peace process contradicts the principles of the National Charter on which the PLO was built and called Arafat and the Palestinian Authority traitors who must be assassinated. These groups also vowed to step up their armed attacks against Arafat and the Israelis in order to abort the treacherous Ziononist-PLO accord. Both Arabs and Israelis alike believe they have a legitimate claim to the city. Since both sides consider Jerusalem their capital, it may seem that there is no room for compromise over its century-old disputes.

V. CONCLUSION

The future status of Jerusalem remains the thorniest unresolved problem at issue between Arabs and Israelis. Before the occupation of Israel in 1967, the city served as the religious site for the three monotheistic faiths—Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It was after Israel annexed East Jerusalem and declared it to be its eternal capital that the conflict reached its culmination, and politicization of the city began. Since then, the city has become the heart of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis; and it also has become an object to test the patriotism and nationalism of both Arab and Israeli political figures.

The Israeli government passed legislation incorporating East Jerusalem and adjacent parts of the West Bank into Israel. It adopted the law in order to integrate Jerusalem into the administrative spheres of a Jewish city and to affirm the Basic Law, that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. It also excluded any reference to the annexation and sovereignty of the city on the part of the Israelis. However, the international community claimed that East Jerusalem had been occupied, not "liberated and unified," and that Israel must abide by international law.

Indeed, the main purpose of this law proved to be more political than judicial because it underlined the political reality of the existing legislation. What encouraged this decision was the division of Jerusalem after 1948 and the belief of many Israelis that "Jerusalem" is the heart of their struggle for a homeland and is theirs by divine right.

As the peace settlement has become more possible, the perception of external threat from the Arab states has weakened, but has exacerbated the deep divisions within

Israeli society and its political parties. As a consequence, the ideological gap between the two major political parties (Labor and Likud) has widened.

The Likud Party and its allies advocate keeping the occupied territories and Jerusalem for ideological and security reasons, claiming that withdrawal to their 1967 boundaries would be detrimental to the defense of the country. The Labor Party, on the other hand, has a different view. While some Labor hawks advocate keeping the land for security purposes, most of the party sees the occupied land as a bargaining chip to use against any United Nations effort to deprive them of it. Both political parties, however, have vowed to keep Jerusalem a united city under Israeli sovereignty.

The Likud party and its allies were cynical about the sincerity and faith of the Labor party towards the status of Jerusalem as an eternal capital of the Jewish state. During the 1996 election campaign, to convince the Jewish people that the Labor party was untrustworthy, the Likud harped on one message in particular: "Peres [Labor leader] will divide Jerusalem." In retaliation against Likud's allegation, Teddy Kollek (ex-mayor of Jerusalem) referred to the peace made by Likud with Egypt, stressing that it was Likud that gave up Sinai and uprooted settlements there, and it was the Labor government that united the city.

When Netanyahu and the Likud won the election, he snuffed out the faint light existing at the end of the tunnel for the future of Jerusalem by approving the expansion of existing settlements in Jerusalem and to the west. In retaliation, Chairman Yasser Arafat warned that the government's new plan for strengthening Israel's hold over Jerusalem could jeopardize hopes for peace; and he vowed that Palestinians would use all means to stand against the city's expansion. To further exacerbate the situation, Islamic Jihad,

together with some eight other dissident Palestinians groups, adamantly rejected the whole principle of Arab-Israel peace negotiation. All radical groups called for Jihad (holy war) against what they called the conspiracy and judaization of Jerusalem; and they all condemned Chairman Arafat and his group as traitors who committed national treason against the Palestinian people in particular and the Islamic world in general. The most strident among radical oppositions is the Hamas group. Hamas leaders reminded the Arab and Moslem world of the Islamic position, which says that if one inch of the Moslems' land is occupied, then they must liberate it with all their means.

Jerusalem has become so polarized because it is so entangled in the domestic politics of each side; thus, none of the many proposed solutions to sharing Jerusalem is likely to work. There is no shortage of creative, viable solutions to sharing Jerusalem. There is a shortage, however, of the domestic political space necessary for the issue to be treated as a technical, bilateral issue only. More than any other final status issue, Jerusalem has become so embroiled in domestic political discourse and processes that it has become an issue impossible to solve bilaterally. It goes without saying that if the issue of Jerusalem can not be solved, then the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue to drag on for years to come.

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